RESEARCH ARTICLE

Folk opera: stories crossing borders in Papua New Guinea

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Abstract

The Life Drama project is a drama-based sexual health promotion project, developed by a cross-cultural research team in Papua New Guinea (PNG) over the past four years. Recognising the limitations of established theatre-in-education and theatre-for-development approaches when working across cultures, the research team explored ways of tapping into the everyday performativity of PNG participants and their communities in order to communicate more powerfully about the personal and social issues involved in sexual health. Through the Folk Opera form, developed by PNG theatre company Raun Raun Theatre around the time of national Independence, the research explored the importance of 'story' in identity formation, maintenance and change, the communication of meaning, and the transmission of tacit local knowledges. In a highly diverse and rapidly-changing country like PNG, enacted stories inherently compel the exchange and exploration of different knowledges, and promote the dialogue and ownership that drives social change. The paper will present and unpack the folk opera form as developed in the Life Drama program, drawing conclusions which may apply to other programs which to promote health and social justice across cultures.

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Introduction

The Life Drama project is a Participatory Action Research project in applied theatre and performance. The project began as a response to the deepening sexual health crisis in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Prevalence rates for HIV in PNG are the highest in the South Pacific, estimated at around one percent nationally (National AIDS Council Secretariat 2011), with much higher rates among certain populations (e.g. 14% among sex workers in Port Moresby; National AIDS Council Secretariat 2011). Of twenty-five truck-drivers recruited by a road-building company in the Southern Highlands in 2010, twenty-three tested positive for HIV (Daly 2010). In December 2009, the total number of people living with HIV in PNG was estimated to be 34,100 (approximately 30,000 people over 15 and 300 children and adolescents). It was estimated that 3,200 people became infected with HIV in 2009 and around 1,300 people died of AIDS in that same year. To the end of 2009, a cumulative total of 11,520 people were estimated to have died of HIV-related illness, and 5,610 had become orphans as a result of the epidemic (National AIDS Council Secretariat 2011).

The catalyst for the Life Drama project was an appeal from an international non-government organisation working in PNG. Staff of the NGO perceived that efforts to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted illnesses (STIs) and HIV in PNG were almost entirely limited to one-way dissemination of health messages – a strategy which has little demonstrated effectiveness (King 1999; Independent Review Group on AIDS 2007). In particular, 'AIDS awareness' in PNG often takes the form of billboards, posters, brochures and other written materials, usually in English, occasionally in Tok Pisin and very occasionally in *tok ples* (local language). There are over 860 different languages spoken in PNG, only a small proportion of the population is fluent in English, and the majority of the population does not read or write in any language (King & Lupiwa 2009). A national review in 2008 concluded that government and non-government organisations continued to invest in the production of written materials despite evidence that these had little to no effect on behaviour (Independent Review Group on AIDS 2007; AusAID 2008).

From the beginning, Life Drama was seen as a strategy for 'crossing boundaries'. Firstly, there are the multiple languages and cultures of PNG: for an education strategy to have national significance, it is necessary to devise some form of language or communication that can be widely 'read', adapted and used. Secondly, there is the often-cited literacy barrier. Since 80-85% of PNG's population live in rural and remote areas, and literacy rates are low even in urban centres, crossing this boundary required communication that did not rely on the written word.

The Life Drama team, working together with theatre practitioners and researchers in PNG, conducted a practice audit of applied theatre and performance activities being used for sexual health promotion in PNG. In parallel, a literature review was conducted on the use of theatre and performance for sexual health education in PNG and internationally. The audit and review concluded that VSO Tokaut AIDS' forum theatre-based intervention, in two Districts, was the only theatre-based intervention to have been systematically evaluated in PNG (Levy 2008). Internationally, there was some evidence of effectiveness for highly participatory forms of applied theatre (eg. Valente & Bharath 1999; Kamo et al. 2008). Apart from the VSO program, however, 'community theatre' approaches to sexual health education in PNG were fragmentary, ephemeral, under-resourced, unco-ordinated, usually 'once-off', and often driven by one motivated individual with little or no formal training in either sexual health or applied theatre and performance (Baldwin 2010).

As a result, these efforts appeared to vary greatly in quality, and to provoke a mixed reaction from 'official' health educators. Most health educators felt that existing performance-based approaches to health education were culturally appropriate, attracted and engaged audiences, and were viewed positively by audiences. However, these performance-based efforts were heavily criticised for trivialising the issues through a focus on comedy ('making the audience laugh'), conveying inaccurate and confusing messages, and functioning only as entertainment rather than as education. There was a strong sense that, with the notable exception of the VSO program, existing theatre-based approaches to sexual health education in PNG were ineffective in promoting behaviour change.

The Life Drama program

The current paper focuses on the development of folk opera as a key component of the Life Drama program. Further information on the design and implementation of the Life Drama program is available elsewhere (Baldwin 2010; www.lifedrama.net). To contextualise the folk opera component briefly, Life Drama was designed as a workshop-based, participatory program of experiential learning, with a foundation in the principles and practices of applied theatre. The program is shaped around the 'open story' of a man who contracts HIV from his girlfriend, and must face the impacts of this along with his wife and daughter. Initially, the program used techniques drawn from drama-in-education and Theatre-for-Development (primarily role-play and image theatre forms, and Boalian techniques such as Rainbow of Desire) to help participants explore the emotional, social, and economic antecedents and consequences of the man's actions, at both an individual and a social level. Topics explored through the drama activities included gender relations, gender inequality, social and cultural norms for men and women, and women's economic disadvantage; the biomechanics of the immune system, HIV transmission and prevention, and the moral and social issues involved (e.g. in abstinence, faithfulness, condom use); demystification of condoms; Voluntary Counselling and Testing; stigma and discrimination; and how people can be supported to live a healthy life with HIV.

The project aimed to develop the Life Drama program to the stage where it could be delivered as a Train the Trainer program, equipping local leaders and educators (eg. teachers, chiefs, churchworkers, healthworkers, police officers, youth leaders, women's leaders, peer educators) to conduct the drama activities in their local communities, tailoring them to local needs and specifics. There was also a recognition that, as leaders developed their confidence and competence in conducting Life Drama activities, some would wish to adapt the activities from a sexual health focus to other health and justice issues facing their communities.

The initial pilot study in Tari, Southern Highlands, was enthusiastically received by the local Research Advisory Group and the workshop participants. However, the research team felt the program was too 'western'. Given the high degree of everyday performativity

in PNG cultures, there was felt to be considerable scope for the incorporation of more indigenous forms of performance into the Life Drama program, to improve the cultural readability and meaning of the activities.

Through local contacts, the team was made aware of the work conducted by Dr Greg Murphy at Raun Raun Theatre, Goroka, in the 1970s. The team made contact with Dr Murphy, and learned that Raun Raun Theatre had focussed on two forms of theatre: folk opera, and the village play. It seemed to the Life Drama team that both these forms, since abandoned, had potential new applications in the context of the Life Drama program. With a view to exploring these possibilities, the team arranged for a two-week Intercultural Theatre Laboratory to be conducted in Madang.

Participants in the Laboratory included the Life Drama team, Dr Murphy, ex-members of Raun Raun Theatre (some of whom were current members of the National Performing Arts Troupe), theatre practitioners from University of Goroka and the University of Papua New Guinea, and Fiona Buffini of VSO Tokaut AIDS. After some days of sharing practice, the group began to focus on how folk opera might be adapted to help deepen and heighten participants' experience of the open story in the Life Drama program. To do this, it was necessary to explore in some depth the role folk opera had played in the life and work of Raun Raun Theatre two decades earlier.

By exploring folk opera, the Life Drama team felt itself to be working on two specific ways of 'crossing boundaries'. Firstly, there was a perceived disconnect between the rich performativity of the country in which the program was being implemented, and the drama-in-education and Theatre-for-Development techniques which had so far been developed as components of the program. Secondly, the team sought to build a bridge between the work of Life Drama in the first decade of the 21st century, and the work of Raun Raun Theatre which had been so vibrant and influential around the time of PNG Independence in 1975.

History of folk opera in Papua New Guinea

Working in Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, in the post-colonial 1970s, Dr. Greg Murphy was struck by the stylistic elements of music and dance that played significant roles

in the performance of traditional folk tales. Murphy (2010) saw the potential to capture and re-shape the strongly spectacular performance and theatre traditions of Papua New Guinea as 'trans-forms', or tools of cultural change (p. 164). Murphy organised his thinking around three 'forces' he saw at work in traditional performance: story force, picture force and feeling force. He perceived the use of 'dialogue as story force to motor the story; mime as picture force to symbol the story; and dance as feeling force to rhythm the story' (Murphy 2010, 67).

Traditional PNG performances often focus on origin stories, which in turn are expressed as life cycles. According to Murphy (2010), the majority of Papua New Guinean cultures are shaped by a belief in 'no end to life but a cosmic regeneration cycle' (30). This belief structure binds people together, to their land and to their ancestors.

Melkote and Steeve (2001) have described 'folk media' as 'products of local culture, rich in cultural symbols, and highly participatory' (252). Murphy, working in collaboration with the members of Raun Raun Theatre, was committed to developing traditional cultural forms of folk media in a modern context. He and his collaborators first achieved this hybrid form by combining traditional songs and dances with an origin story from the Siassi Islands. By improvising dialogue during the rehearsal process, plot and narrative voice emerged organically. The result was *Betlail*, the first of eight folk operas to be developed by Raun Raun Theatre in Papua New Guinea (1975 – 1984).

The term *folk opera* emerged in the post-colonial 1960's performance history of Nigeria and Africa. According to Laurence and Stovel (2001), its origins emerged from embracing traditional forms after these cultures were subjected to Western imperialism. For example, Duro Ladipo, a church musician, composed music to adaptations of historical subjects for his 'own secular folk operas' (20). Yoruba folk opera, according to Pavis (1996), was 'a theatrical form that relates back to the Alarinjo travelling theatre tradition that can be traced back to Yoruba culture as far as the sixteenth century' (35).

Aesthetically, Murphy (2010) drew from the folk media and cultural performance traditions of his actors and his personal interest in drama, dance and music. He felt that the performance forms his actors used were inculturated and embodied within the performing self. These cultural influences embodied within performers from different areas included:

1) Siassi dances;

2) art and ceremony of the Gulf;

3) farce traditions of Eastern Highlands and Simbu;

4) Trobriand dance and story;

5) Manus dance and Garamut music; and

6) Kiwai dance and Gogodala design

Murphy (2010) refers to this culturally eclectic palate as 'syncretic creativity … a creative release from stylisation…the larger experiment was in the nebulus area of something greater than the sum' (248). He describes tapping into a long cultural memory: Raun Raun actors, whose bodies were culturally informed, maintained contact with their own cultures and at the same time were part of constructing a national culture (2010, 93). As a player in the cultural politics of Papua New Guinea, Murphy (2010) believes the company was 'a transformational factor in its aesthetic environment' (11).

Compositionally, Murphy's folk operas shared symbolic similarities with the tradition of Greek theatre. Thematically they investigated the relationship between human and supernatural, metaphorically exposing an underlying moral to audiences. As Murphy (2010) states:

> Creation and origin stories were an important part of this genre because of their significance for the history and cultural unconscious of the people… Structurally, a clear plot line delivered the performance in three parts, intricately weaving lengthy oral stories and epic poems. Physically, the performers executed actions repetitious of their everyday life shared with the audience. Via lived connections to the stories and art forms, performers embodied heightened mimesis (mimicry), enabling audiences to identify with the imitation. Designed for large rural and urban audiences, the performance required a designated performance space and may have included the use of large artefacts for example, masks, props, scenery and costumes of traditional dress (58-63).

However, Murphy also identified major differences between folk opera and Greek theatre traditions. The folk opera genre revealed all action on stage, travelling

freely through time and place, rather than adopting the linear conventions of Greek theatre. Musical interludes provided emotional emphasis at key points.

In 1975, PNG celebrated its independence from Australia. In the lead-up to Independence and in the years following, creative artists in PNG were much concerned with the question of whether a Papua New Guinean national identity could be articulated, and if so what did it look like? One of Raun Raun Theatre's most successful folk operas, performed in major venues throughout the world, was *Sail the Midnight Sun*. This folk opera, whose protagonist was named Nuigini, represented a kind of origin myth for the new nation of Papua New Guinea, and incorporated elements from numerous PNG cultures.

Murphy (2010) asserts that Raun Raun Theatre's exploration of folk opera gave rise to a new theatre tradition in Papua New Guinea: 'All other Papua New Guinea theatre consciously or unconsciously relates to it with all the ironies this involves' (180). There is a certain irony in the way Raun Raun Theatre's folk opera, originally created for rural and remote audiences, went on to achieve national and international acclaim before falling into disuse. By contrast, Raun Raun's other major innovation, the village play, played an influential role in shaping conceptions of 'community theatre' in Papua New Guinea which are still evident today.

History of the village play in Papua New Guinea

Murphy (2010) suggests that folk opera gave Raun Raun Theatre both a national and international reputation and experience, but it was the 'village play which provided the Company's ideology and rootedness, its centre' (179). Village plays used theatre as a way for the villages to investigate their own problems. Stylistically, the form embraced elements of popular theatre, theatre for development, satire, and community animation. Murphy (2010) explains that there has always been popular theatre in Papua New Guinea, often called 'traditional theatre', with this term referring to all communal and popular forms of performance. Raun Raun's early village play, 'Poket Buruk', drew its aesthetic roots from the traditional plays of the Kainantu area, Eastern Highlands. The aesthetic origin of barbarous,

crude and wild melodrama in village plays lies in the traditional plays and melodramas performed by the Namau, Koriki people (Murphy 2010).

There were some parallels between village plays and Indonsesian Ludruk theatre. As Schechter (2003) explains, 'each Ludruk performance is a collection of prefabricated parts' (58) – in turn, not unlike the commedia dell'arte. Both Ludruk and village plays manipulate comical farce, song, melodrama and the symbolic use of clown sequences to incite 'raucous audience reaction' (Murphy 2010, 69). Ludruk performers and audiences are usually lower-class city-dwellers personally affected by urbanisation, secularisation and the accompanying value changes (Schechter 2003). Performers and audiences for Raun Raun's village plays often came from similar backgrounds. Not surprisingly, there was considerable overlap between the issues addressed in village plays and those of Ludruk theatre (Murphy 2010). Both forms explore to varying degrees themes of modernisation, and 'the imbalance that exists between a large deprived majority and a small elite minority' (Murphy 2010, 159).

In 1978, Murphy established a connection with Kidd and the 'Third World Theatre' network. Kidd (1984) has detailed the progression of theatre for development, a participatory theatre used as a development tool in Africa. His writings highlight the need for new approaches which are 'participatory, critical and a catalyst for collective change' (12). Kidd believes cultural development must proceed from the traditional roots of the people. He distinguishes Action for Cultural and Political Change as a unique model using the power of drama for transformation based on a participatory process rather than an 'anaesthetising product'.

The development of folk opera as a component of Life Drama

At the Intercultural Theatre Laboratory in Madang, members of Raun Raun Theatre performed examples of village plays, in order to orient those unfamiliar with the form. The examples chosen focussed on issues of malaria prevention and sanitation. A video extract from *Sail the Midnight Sun* was screened as an example of a folk opera. Similarities and differences between the two forms were discussed. It was noted that folk opera used much greater use of ritual, chant, stylised movement, dance, music, instrumentation, singing, and

bilas (costume and body adornment) than the village play, which tended to rely more on 'realistic' dialogue and role-play. Murphy explained his model of 'story force', 'picture force' and 'feeling force': the power of narrative, the power of spectacle, and the power of emotion, to move and educate the folk opera audience. The Life Drama team was keen to explore how this model could be employed to strengthen the engagement of participants in Life Drama workshops, and thus to make their learning experience more comprehensive, powerful and memorable. In a way, the team was seeking to revitalise both the folk opera and the village play forms in a participatory context.

The group collaboratively reviewed the Life Drama open story for moments of greatest narrative tension. These were identified as:

1. The point at which the male protagonist can choose to remain faithful to his wife, or have sex with another woman

2. The point at which the male protagonist is under pressure to choose whether or not to go for HIV testing

3. The point at which the male protagonist learns he is HIV positive

4. Potentially, a point at which the family and community decide to support the male protagonist to live a healthy life with HIV

These four points were explored performatively, with the indigenous participants contributing songs, dances and rituals from various parts of PNG. Four short folk operas were developed, to relate to each of the above points. They were respectively labelled:

1. Horns of a Dilemma

2. Epiphany

3. Mourning Song

4. Celebration

The Epiphany folk opera was selected for further development, as it had the clearest narrative structure, and offered obvious potential for incorporation into the open story. There was a widespread consensus which included the pilot group in Tari, the participants in the Laboratory, PNG healthworkers consulted by Life Drama, and the available literature, that convincing men to attend Voluntary Counselling and Treatment (VCT) is one of the

major challenges to halting the spread of sexually transmitted illnesses and HIV. The Laboratory agreed that the narrative of the Epiphany folk opera should take the protagonist from refusing VCT to accepting it. The Laboratory participants felt the factors which would change the man's mind would vary from one cultural context to another, but that in any Papua New Guinean culture three factors were likely to play a positive role: spiritual experience (a belief that God, spirits or ancestors wished him to be tested), family considerations (concern for his children and their future well-being), and support from close male friends or relatives.

Based on these three factors, the group conceived and presented a folk opera in which the man had a dream involving his family and ancestral spirits. On waking, the man described his dream to his best friend, who offered to accompany him to the hospital. This Folk Opera involved elements of song from the island of Manus, dance from the Highlands, and music from a number of different regions.

There followed a lively discussion among Laboratory participants as to how the folk opera form could be used as a component of Life Drama. One possibility was that the Epiphany folk opera be taught to participants in the form devised at the Laboratory, using the same songs and dances. At the other end of the spectrum, it was proposed that new groups of participants be encouraged to devise completely new folk operas with the same narrative journey (story force), but incorporating their own local songs, dances, bilas etc. (picture force).

Ultimately, it was decided that the folk opera activity should be defined by some structuring elements, within which the participants would be encouraged to collaboratively create their own folk opera by tapping into their specific cultural and individual performativity. The structuring elements would provide reassurance, guidance and support for both the participants and their leaders (Life Drama trainees), without overly constraining the group's aesthetic expression. The structuring elements maintained were:

1. The idea of a dream, vision or visitation

2. The pre-text of a poem, recited in Tok Pisin by the protagonist's child within the dream

3. Instructions to the participants to consider the forms associated with ancestral or guiding spirits in their local culture

4. The involvement of a male friend or relative in the protagonist's final decision

5. The narrative movement from refusing testing to accepting testing

The pre-text which served as a springboard for the folk opera was a poem, composed in Tok Pisin by a Papua New Guinean member of the Life Drama team, Simbu actor and dancer Martin Tonny. It is as follows:

Papa, Papa,

Kirap na lukim star I karai

Paia I kukuim kalip diwai

Ol Snek I danis

Papa Papa, mi poret

Noken lusim mi.

Papa, Papa,

Wake up and see the sky crying

Fire is burning the kalip tree

The snakes are dancing

Papa, papa I am afraid

Don't leave me.

It was recognised that the kalip tree is a cultural referent specific to Madang Province (where the Intercultural Laboratory took place). The reference to a snake as a spiritual portent of danger or evil was, however, considered ubiquitous in Papua New Guinean cultures.

Folk opera on Karkar Island

Actively involved in the Intercultural Theatre Laboratory in Madang were two land-owners from nearby Karkar Island, one of whom was an ex-member of Raun Raun Theatre and current member of the National Performing Arts Troupe. Discussion with these land-owners, and with the local Member of Parliament, resulted in the team being invited to conduct a week-long trial of the new Life Drama program, incorporating the Folk Opera component, on Karkar Island[1].

Members of 'theatre groups' (more accurately, traditional dance troupes) from five villages agreed to participate in the program. There were seventeen men and eight women, aged from mid-teens to approximately mid-sixties, though most were in their twenties and thirties. The group included a teacher, a healthcare worker, a mothers' representative, and several church and community leaders. All participants completed pre- and post-program interviews, conducted in Tok Pisin with local interviewers, in order to assess the program's effectiveness as an experiential learning approach to sexual health.

It is a tenet of the Life Drama program that the open story be tailored to the local context. On Karkar Island, therefore, on the advice of the Research Advisory Group (which included both local land-owners mentioned above, plus other key leaders), the story concerned a man named Sam, his wife Sagilam, their daughter Onpain, and Sam's girlfriend Lucy. Sam worked at the fish cannery in Madang, travelling home to Karkar Island on weekends. During the week he visited clubs and discos in Madang with his workmates, and at one of these clubs he met Lucy, a woman willing to have sex for money.

Working with this foundational information, the team began by implementing the Life Drama program much as it had previously been implemented in Tari. The participants enacted scenes which explored the characters of Sam and Sagilam, their meeting, marriage, and early married life. In one scene, Sagilam discovered a text message from Lucy and confronted Sam over his infidelity and its possible consequences. The emotional ramifications of this discovery were explored using Boal's Rainbow of Desire. In a Leader-in-

Role scene, Sam's boss expressed concerns regarding Sam's health and encouraged him to go for Voluntary Counselling and Testing for HIV, but Sam refused.

At this point, the group was divided into three small groups and asked to devise a folk opera using the elements outlined above. The groups each moved into their own space (under trees, on the beach, in the village communal area) to begin discussing and designing scenes. Initial quiet group discussions gave way to physical rehearsals and improvisational use of dialogue, song and dance. This process culminated in a Friday afternoon performance in which the three groups interwove their individual performances to create a spectacular dream sequence. The sequence commenced with Sagilam issuing an ultimatum to Sam (go for testing or leave the family). Sam then lay down to sleep, but had visions of his daughter, a snake, and troubling spirits which lifted him bodily and heaved him about. When Sam awoke, he confided his dream in his best friend, who stated that such a dream must not be ignored and offered to accompany Sam to the hospital for testing.

The Life Drama team and Research Advisory Team, reflecting on the folk opera, made a number of significant observations. Firstly, all participants engaged in the creative process eagerly and confidently. This may be partly attributable to their experience and status as members of theatre troupes, but it was also felt to reflect the high level of 'everyday performativity' in Karkar Island culture and therefore the participants' high degree of comfort and familiarity with storytelling through music, dance and ritual.

Secondly, although one of the dances from the Intercultural Theatre Laboratory was incorporated into the folk opera, participants reflected that this element had not been required, since they had their own songs and dances to express the issues and emotions involved. By contrast, the pre-text of the poem was viewed as a helpful springboard, since it was open enough not to dictate form, but emotionally powerful enough to help drive the 'feeling force' of the folk opera.

Thirdly, the participants were so enthusiastic about the folk opera that they asked to perform it again when the workshop resumed on Monday morning. Although there was no audience apart from the Life Drama team, casual onlookers, and the group itself, participants wished to 'do justice' to the folk opera by performing it 'properly'. The Monday morning performance was a truly spectacular event featuring a large number of musicians performing on traditional instruments, and all performers dressed in elaborate bilas

(traditional dress). There was no doubting the 'story force', 'picture force' and 'feeling force' of this highly focussed, energised, spectacular performance. The training team felt the participants had taken ownership of the folk opera form, and the group debrief confirmed that some participants were considering how this form could be used for publicly exploring other issues within the community.

Perhaps most significantly, although the bald synopsis of Sam's change of heart may read on the page as pat and unbelievable, the participants were emphatic that the events of the folk opera – marital pressure, concern over the future of his family, the sense of an encounter with spiritual forces, and the support of the male friend – would realistically influence a man like Sam to go for testing. Life Drama, like other forms of applied theatre, is based on a belief that providing participants with an experience like Sam's is a workable substitute for 'real' experience. That is, although the folk opera was on one level an imaginary journey in a safe space, it engaged participants' bodies, minds, emotions, memories and relationships in a way that was entirely real. It is through this liminal experience provided by participatory theatre that learning is expected to occur. By enabling participants to straddle the boundary between imaginary and real, the folk opera acted as a conduit for new knowledge of and attitudes towards HIV testing. Post-program interviews confirmed that participants had developed more positive attitudes towards both HIV testing, and non-discriminatory treatment of people living with HIV.

Folk Opera as Intercultural Theatre

Interculturalism broadly defines an exchange between two or more cultures. Holledge and Tompkins (2000) refer to interculturalism as 'the meeting in the moment of performance of two or more cultural traditions, a temporary fusing of styles and/or techniques and/or cultures' (7). According to Holledge and Tompkins, culture is defined as 'the way in which we understand our identities and the means through which we encounter other cultures' (4). These authors view culture as located in the construction of the self, not in demarcated national, regional or ethnic boundaries.

The definition of this research as intercultural engagement draws on the work of Lo and Gilbert (2002), who state: 'intercultural theatre is a hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions' (36). They describe intercultural theatre as encompassing 'public performance practices characterised by the conjunction of specific cultural resources at the level of narrative content, performance aesthetics, production processes, and/or reception by an interpretive community' (31).

Lo and Gilbert (2002) identify intercultural exchange as a two-way flow, proposing that the general modes of intercultural exchange exist along a continuum between collaborative and imperialistic processes. The Intercultural Theatre Laboratory was positioned along the continuum between the two broad cultural sources of Western and Boalian drama-in-education and Theatre-for-Development techniques, and indigenous Papua New Guinean performativity. Over the days and the various activities of the Laboratory, the location of the intercultural exchange was not fixed. Its position remained fluid, with the focus sometimes on one cultural source, sometimes on the other, and often attempting to hold both sources dynamically and productively in balance. In Lo and Gilbert's terminology,

> Both source cultures bring to the theatrical project cultural apparatuses shaped by their respective sociocultural milieu, and both undergo a series of transformations and challenges in the process of exchange in relation to each other (44).

The logistics and working relationships within the Laboratory were developed via negotiation and collaboration among the various groups of participants, who brought various cultural and individual expertise to the exchange: the Life Drama team, Dr Greg Murphy, Ms Buffini, ex-Raun Raun Theatre members, and current UPNG and University of Goroka theatre practitioners. Pavis (1996) emphasises that intercultural theatre is most effective when it is accepted as inter-corporeal work, in which an actor confronts his/her technique and professional identity in the context of others: 'The greater its concern with the exchange of corporeal techniques, the more political and historical it becomes' (15).

Folk Opera as Adaptation

From the time of Raun Raun Theatre's earliest experiments with folk opera and village plays, Dr Greg Murphy was concerned with questions of adaptation of traditional indigenous performance to serve contemporary ends.

Sanders (2006) has distinguished between adaptation and appropriation, defining adaptation as being a relocation or having a recognisable link to a source text, while appropriation is a radical departure from source. She places adaptation and appropriation as creative variations on a spectrum, intersecting and interrelating at many points, via 'multiple interactions and a matrix of possibilities' (160).

Hutcheon (2006) agrees that 'adaptations have an overt and defining relationship to prior texts, usually revealingly called sources' (3). She notes that adaptive processes are no longer bound by literary source texts but encompass adaptation across various media landscapes such as television, film, theme parks, theatre, Internet, novels, comic books and video arcades. Hutcheon's theory defines adaptations across media landscapes as 're-mediations, that is, specifically translations in the form of intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system (e.g. words) to another (e.g. images)' (16).

For Hutcheon (2006), transpositioning incorporates: 1) transcoding texts from one genre to another; 2) a change of context and narratalogical point of view; or 3) a shift in ontology, from an historical account to fictionalised narrative. She writes, 'Just as there is no such thing as literal translation, there can be no literal adaptation' (16). Further definitions include transmutation or transcoding, alternatively described as paraphrasing (Bluestone 1957, 1971), which refers to adaptations into a new set of conventions as well as signs, for example, novels to cinema, metaphorical writing paraphrased into visual imagery. Here the process of adaptation includes not only narrative strategies but also the media in which they are presented. Most theories of adaptation agree that the story is essentially the common denominator. Hutcheon adds this further clarification:

> … different modes of engagement - narrating, performing or interacting. In adapting, the story argument goes, 'equivalences' are sought in different sign systems for the various

elements of the story: its themes, events, world, characters, motivations, points of view, consequences, contexts, symbols, imagery, and so on (10)

Murphy led the Intercultural Theatre Exchange Laboratory to consider adaptation in terms of the appropriate use of de-specified cultural referents. There was considerable discussion of the distinction between cultural performance that is sacred, belonging to a particular group and private to that group (or to a subgroup, such as initiated men of a specific community), and cultural performance that is public and able to be shared (for example, performances that take place at cultural shows). It was agreed that adaptation can be performed respectfully as a collaboration between a group of educators, such as the Life Drama team, and appropriate representatives of the local community. The example discussed was that of the high conical mask plus 'skirt', a form of costuming adopted by many groups and cultures ranging from the Duk Duk and Tubuan dancers of Papua New Guinea to the traditional European hooded Death figure to the Ku Klux Klan. Murphy explained that the use of a costume of this *shape*, so long as it featured no group-specific markings, would be deemed an acceptable appropriation of Duk Duk or Tubuan costuming. Such a costume, viewed in a folk opera, would be appreciated by the audience as a cultural referent without offending cultural or religious protocols.

This notion of appropriation was readily accepted by the participants in the Life Drama program conducted on Karkar Island. Participants were happy to build their folk opera using the symbolic power of traditional instruments, costumes, music, song, and dance, while affirming that no sacred or secret material was implicated or protocols breached through this process.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the development of folk opera as a component of the Life Drama program, specifically in terms of 'crossing boundaries' – intercultural, intracultural, across languages, artforms and disciplines. In this instance, the folk opera form was used to strengthen an applied performance program for sexual health education and behaviour change in Papua New Guinea. However, the form has potential application within other traditionally performative cultures, to address a range of community problems including health and social justice issues.

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Notes

1. The work on Folk Opera also resulted in the creation of a new form designed to incorporate local performance traditions, Dancing Diseases; the development of this form has been reported on elsewhere (Baldwin 2010b).

Notes on Contributors

Professor Brad Haseman is Professor and Assistant Dean (Academic) for the Creative Industries Faculty at Queensland University of Technology, Australia. Formerly a drama teacher and advisor in Queensland secondary schools, Brad has worked in arts education for over 30 years. He is Principal Investigator on the Australian Research Council funded project *Life Drama*. This work has led to a partnership with the *Drama for Life* program at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Currently Brad is leading a team of artists and educators preparing web-based resource materials to support the implementation of the Australian National Curriculum *The Arts*.

Dr Andrea Baldwin is a Senior Research Fellow in the Creative Industries Faculty at Queensland University of Technology. She holds a PhD in Psychology from The University of Queensland, and a Master of Arts (Drama) from QUT. Andrea is a registered psychologist who has combined a career in health service management, health provider education and public health, with applied theatre practice and practice-led research. Andrea has served as Life Drama's Project Manager and Research Manager from its inception, while co-creating and helping deliver the program. She has particular interests in Participatory Action Research, and effective evaluation for arts health initiatives.

Dr Hayley Linthwaite is a Postdoctoral Fellow in Arts Education, in the Creative Industries Faculty at Queensland University of Technology. Her PhD in Creative Industries was based partly on her work as a member of the Life Drama team. Hayley has extensive experience in the performing arts, education and community sectors as a teacher, curriculum devisor, director and consultant. She recently completed a Rotary Peace Fellowship at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand, where she adapted applied theatre forms for conflict resolution and peace building.